

# SOUTH PACIFIC TAC RECON

OVER SOME OF THE MOST HOSTILE TERRITORY OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR, THE PILOTS OF THE 82nd AND 110th TACTICAL RECONNAISSANCE SQUADRONS REEQUIP WITH NORTH AMERICAN MUSTANGS TO FIGHT THE JAPANESE - PART TWO

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PHOTOGRAPHY FROM THE ROBERT BOURLIER COLLECTION

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article is being continued from the October issue of *Air Classics*.

You can almost feel the sea breeze and the humidity in this photograph of 110th TRS Mustangs. Lead Mustang is F-6K #27 44-12813 and after the end of the war it was assigned to the 160th TRS, 10th TRG. Taken at Ie Shima on 14 August 1945.

Everyone wanted a photo next to Mt. Fuji and the tac recon Mustangs were the ideal aircraft to take such photos. P-51D-20-NA #60 44-72509 of the 71st TRS poses near the iconic landmark. This aircraft survived the war but was written off on 25 February 1947 in an accident at Johnson Airbase in Japan. This was 110th TRS CO Maj. Archuleta's Mustang.



Nicely done "homemade" sign for the 71st TRG, illustrating each squadron and its equipment.



The two tac recon squadrons continued to move from island to island to keep up with the advancing Allied naval and ground forces. The 110th had joined the 82nd at Biak in mid-September, and the following month the latter relocated to Morotai Island — a little over 200 miles northwest of New Guinea — where it began converting to the tactical photo recon version of the North American P-51D Mustang — the F-6D — that November. These Mustangs feature a port for a vertical K-24 camera on either side of the lower fuselage, just forward of the tail wheel, and another for an oblique

K-17 just above the left K-24 port.

From late September to mid-December 1944, 26 F-6D-10-NAs and -15-NAs tactical photographic reconnaissance versions of the P-51D-10-NA and -15-NA, arrived by ship in New Guinea and were assigned to the 5th Air Force — and most of them subsequently to the 71st Tactical Recon Group. After being reassembled and flight tested by the 8th Service Group at Nadzab, they were then ferried to the 82nd TRS at Morotai, except for two that were destroyed in crashes while being flight tested by 301st Air Depot Squadron pilots.

## LEYTE

On 20 October, US Army units were landed on Leyte Island in the east central Philippines. Although the initial invasion went smoothly, the battle for Leyte would be very difficult. This was due to the increasingly stiff resistance of the Japanese ground forces, the lousy weather (including lots of rain), and the constant air raids. The Americans initially gained control of most of the island's northeast coast, which soon contained five airfields. On 3 November, the 110th TRS began moving to Dulag Airdrome (A/D), which was right on the coast. (The terms airfield, airdrome, and airstrip were pretty much

interchangeable in the Southwest Pacific as pilots and intel officers wrote their reports, which to the researcher can be somewhat maddening!) Two days later, Group HQ moved to the nearby Bayug A/D. While the 110th's ground echelon was at Dulag, its air echelon sometimes operated from Tacloban, also on the coast about 20 miles to the north. Among their many contributions to the Leyte campaign, its pilots shot down a number of enemy aircraft.

On the early morning of 7 November, some of the 110th TRS' P-40N pilots skirmished with enemy fighters over and near Ormoc Bay, on the west side of the island. Captain

Rubel V. Archuleta, 1st Lt. George R. Marman, and 2nd Lts. Harry Johnson and Martin J. Regan each claimed to have shot down a single-engined JAAF Nakajima Ki-43 Oscar fighter. (Archuleta would assume command of the Squadron on 14 December, followed by a promotion to major.)

Three days later, in the same area, 2nd Lt. Roy Rule also shot down an Oscar, and another, unidentified, Warhawk pilot probably destroyed a JNAF Mitsubishi A6M-3 Hamp, the clipped-wing version of the Zero. On 29 November, Flight Officer (F/O) Morris J. Washatka shot down two Oscars and 2nd Lt. Warren O. Twiggs another over

the large island of Cebu southwest of Leyte.

There was another loss on 1 December. A 110th TRS flight was patrolling near Tacloban, from where it had taken off, when its pilots became separated in some particularly heavy cloud and rain. The flight leader, Lt. George Marman, flying P-40N-20-CU 43-23243, was last seen in the clouds at 3000 feet in a diving turn; his wingman, 2nd Lt. C.J. Fagerland, having advised "him to pull up because there were mountains somewhere below us." Lieutenant Marman was later declared deceased.

On the afternoon of 4 December, a